DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 072 CS 208 856

AUTHOR Ericson, Bonnie Ohrlund
TITLE A Comparison of Responses to Short Stories and Textbook Selections: A Descriptive Study of Three Adolescents' Individual and Group Responses.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 28p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Expository Writing; *Females; Grade 10; High Schools; Oral Language; *Reader Response; *Reading Processes; *Reading Research; Short Stories; Textbooks
IDENTIFIERS *Reader Expectations; Reader Text Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to describe and compare the oral responses of three adolescents to two short stories and two textbook selections and to identify their general expectations for reading and responding to fiction and exposition. Three tenth grade girls were interviewed about their family lives, interests, preferences for and experiences with reading, general expectations for fiction and exposition, and experiences with whole class and small group discussions. Individual responses were collected and tape recorded following the readings and following small group discussions. Analysis resulted in the following generalizations about the three readers' responses and expectations: (1) each girl had a preferred pattern of response common to both the short stories and textbook selections; (2) purpose for reading informed all other general expectations for fiction and exposition; (3) establishment of text-specific expectations was central to responses to short stories, but not to textbook selections; (4) both text types were evaluated according to the match of a reader's general expectations and knowledge with text form and content; (5) all three girls benefited from the group discussions; and (6) each reader identified the strengths and weaknesses of the other girls' responses and examined her own responses in light of the others. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED257072

A COMPARISON OF RESPONSES TO SHORT STORIES AND TEXTBOOK SELECTIONS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THREE ADOLESCENTS' INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP RESPONSES

Bonnie Ohrlund Ericson
Lecturer, Department of Secondary and Adult Education
School of Education
236 Monterey Hall
California State University - Northridge
Northridge, California 91330

office: (818) 885-2576/2580
home: (818) 764-8634

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bonnie O. Ericson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 208 866

Abstract

A Comparison of Responses to Short Stories and Textbook Selections:
A Descriptive Study of Three Adolescents' Individual and Group Responses

The purposes of the study were to 1) describe and compare the oral responses of three adolescents to short stories and textbook selections, 2) identify and compare these readers' general expectations for fiction and exposition, and relate these expectations to their responses, 3) describe and compare their text-specific expectations during their reading of the short stories and textbook selections, and 4) investigate changes in the readers' responses during and after small group discussions.

Three 10th-grade girls were interviewed to learn about their family lives, interests, preferences for and experiences with reading, general expectations for fiction and exposition, and experiences with whole class and small group discussions. Each responded to two short stories and two social studies textbook selections. Individual responses to each text were collected at several points during reading, following reading, and following small group discussions. An intensive content analysis of the transcriptions from the tape recorded sessions gradually led to the investigator's identification of categories for coding and describing data. Further analysis and synthesis of the data resulted in generalizations about the three readers' responses and expectations.

Results of the study included the following: each girl had a preferred pattern of response common to both the short stories and textbook selections; purpose for reading informed all other general expectations for fiction and exposition; establishment of text-specific expectations was central to responses to short stories, but not to textbook selections; both text types were evaluated according to the match of a reader's general expectations and knowledge with text form and content; all three girls were able to benefit from the group discussions; and each reader identified the strengths and weaknesses of the other girls' responses, and examined her own responses in light of the others.' Potential implications for teaching are discussed.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Comparison of Responses to Short Stories and Textbook Selections:
A Descriptive Study of Three Adolescents' Individual and Group Responses

The purposes of this study were to 1) describe and compare the oral responses of three adolescents to two short stories and two textbook selections, 2) to identify these readers' general expectations for reading and responding to fiction and exposition, and relate these expectations to their responses, 3) to describe and compare these readers' text-specific expectations during their reading of short stories and textbook selections, and 4) to investigate changes in their responses during and after small group discussions.

Background to the Study

Literary response theorists emphasize the significant role of response in arriving at the "meaning" of a literary work; these theorists contend that it is the meeting of reader responses and text that creates the literary work (Britton, 1982; Holland, 1975; Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978). In other words, the experience of reading is central. Despite their use of different terminology, reader response theorists are in remarkable agreement about the nature of response to literature, emphasizing its dynamic and recursive quality, as well as the distinctiveness of individuals' responses according to their knowledge and experiences (Britton, 1982; Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978). At the same time, none of these theorists supports acceptance of any and every response. Rather, all concur that the text limits and guides individual responses. Further, individual responses may be shared with others who have read the same text, and this sharing of responses may lead to reexamination or modification of individual responses (Britton, 1982; Holland, 1975; Rosenblatt, 1976, 1978).

There is less agreement on the nature of response to exposition. The "meaning" of exposition relies more strongly on text, according to Olson (1977) and Rosenblatt (1976, 1978). In other words, there is a greater emphasis on literal and interpretive comprehension of the information presented in the text.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

However, readers must still draw on their knowledge and experiences, both to comprehend and to read critically, so that differences in background may lead to variations in understanding and evaluation (Anderson, et al., 1977; Applebee, 1978; Britton, 1982; Rumelhart, 1980).

Numerous studies based on reader response theory have examined response to literature. Written or oral responses to short stories, poems, or novels have been collected during or following reading, and have been elicited by tasks ranging from free response to highly structured pencil and paper tasks. The subjects of these studies have ranged from young children to adults. A final and important distinction in response studies is the scale of the research. Some studies have been large scale studies (for example, Applebee, 1978; Beach, 1973; Purves, 1973; Squire, 1964); these studies generally attempted to establish the range of types of response, identify difficulties in responding, or link responses to various reader or text characteristics. More recently, however, researchers have examined a small number of individuals' responses in an attempt to explore more intensely the complex nature of response (for example, Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1982; Galda, 1980; Holland, 1975; Mauro, 1983; Odell & Cooper, 1976). These studies generally attempted to explain individuals' responses in light of their knowledge, attitudes, developmental stage, or personality.

To my knowledge, response to exposition has not been examined in the same way as response to literature. For example, many studies limit their focus to literal or interpretive comprehension. Studies investigating critical comprehension or comprehension monitoring of exposition often use artificial texts or require subjects to select rather than supply information or judgments (for example, Hare & Pulliam, 1980; Mize, 1980; Patching et al., 1983). The present study uses a reader response approach to compare responses to literary and expository texts.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

General expectations for reading fiction--also termed concept of story (Applebee, 1978) or construct of form (Mauro, 1983)--have been shown to be central to responses to literature, particularly evaluative responses (Mauro, 1983). To compare responses to short stories and textbook selections, this study investigates general expectations for both fiction and exposition.

Expectations may also be text-specific, what a reader anticipates for upcoming text based on a combination of general expectations and what has been read so far in a particular text. Thus Iser (1978) described response as a recursive process of establishing, checking, and reestablishing expectations, and distinguished literary from expository texts according to the extent to which expectations are met. This study compares text-specific expectations for two types of text.

Finally, the small group discussion format is used in many secondary classrooms and advocated by departments of teacher education. Yet research concerning the benefits of small group discussion for individual responses is limited. The present study investigates changes in responses to short stories and textbook selections during and after small group discussions.

This study is based on a dialectical theory of reading synthesized from the work of Rosenblatt, Iser, Britton, and Applebee. I assume that in the reading of both fiction and exposition readers actively construct meaning and respond to that meaning. I also assume that comprehension and response are compatible, recursive, dynamic, and mutually influencing processes.

Design of the Study

The present study uses the descriptive techniques of Galda (1980) and Mauro (1983) to closely investigate three readers' individual and group responses to two short stories and two social studies textbook selections.

The Participants

I chose three 10th-grade girls to participate in the study from a group of volunteers from the honors interdisciplinary English and social studies classes

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

at a suburban high school in upstate New York. These students were also recommended by their 9th- and 10th-grade English teachers as students who read with few comprehension difficulties, were articulate in responding to their reading, and who participated in class discussions. Restricting their number to three allowed all to participate actively in the small group discussions. The three were all girls since being the single male or female in the group might be uncomfortable for a 10th grader, and because of the findings that girls tend to be more willing to share their emotional reactions (Applebee, 1978). I have changed the girls' real names to Kate, Pat, and Tess.

The Texts

The two short stories ("The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst and "Marigolds" by Eugenia Collier) and the two social studies textbook selections ("Agencies of Socialization: The Family" from a text by Elkin and Handel and "Structure and Interaction in the American Family" from a text by Light and Keller) were all concerned with the topic "the family." These stories and textbook selections were recommended by high school English and social studies teachers as texts which 10th-grade girls would enjoy or find interesting. All the texts had the potential for a wide range of responses, were unfamiliar to the participants, and were of a length allowing reading and responding within a class period. One of the textbook selections utilized headings and subheadings to clearly organize text content; the other did not.

I divided each of the texts into six segments in order to collect ongoing as well as final responses. These divisions were of similar length and were made according to the development of the story or ideas.

Procedures

Each girl was involved in nine individual and four group sessions during a four week period. At the initial session I met individually with Kate, Pat, and Tess to "break the ice," explain the procedures, and interview each to learn

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

about her family, interests, experiences with and preferences for reading, general expectations for reading fiction and exposition, and experiences with whole class and small group discussions. These initial sessions and all subsequent sessions were tape recorded.

In the remaining sessions, the girls responded first individually, then in a group, and again individually to each of the short stories and textbook selections, which were presented alternately. When reading each text for the first time, each girl read the first segment silently, talked about her thoughts, feelings, opinions, and reactions (Squire, 1964), and then predicted what the next segment could be about. This procedure was followed for all six segments (without the prediction following the final segment). Individual post-reading and group responses were elicited by open-ended questions, as were individual post-discussion responses. At the final post-discussion session, each girl described her overall reactions to the study, the four texts, and the discussions.

Analysis of Data

All tape recordings were transcribed, and I added bracketed comments or underlining to reflect the tone or emphasis of the tape recordings. I listened to the tape recordings and read and reread the transcriptions to identify and categorize recurrent ideas, topics, patterns, and themes. The final categories for describing responses, general expectations, and text-specific expectations evolved gradually from my repeated examinations of the data and are summarized in Table 1 (see p. 6). Data were frequently coded into more than one category according to the different types of information they contained.

Response. To achieve a complete understanding of these readers' responses, information from three categories must be considered. Style of response refers to the ways a reader responded, such as literal comprehension, involvement, inference, or evaluation (Galda, 1983). Focus of response refers to the topic of

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Final Categories for the Coding of Responses and Expectations

RESPONSES

1. Style of Response (Galda, 1983)
   a. Comprehension: text- or reader-centered
   b. Involvement: text-or reader-centered
   c. Inference: text- or reader-centered
   d. Evaluation
      1. Categoric: text- or reader-centered
      2. Analytic: text- or reader-centered
      3. Generalization: text- or reader-centered

2. Focus of Response
   a. Purpose for reading
   b. Process of reading
   c. Text content
   d. Organization of text
   e. Language/style of text
   f. Reader personal associations
   g. Reader knowledge or beliefs
   h. Reader hypothetical scenarios
   i. Irrelevant

3. Quality of Response
   a. Comprehension or Inference: correct, incorrect, question, correction, confirmation
   b. Involvement: high, moderate, low
   c. Evaluation: positive, neutral, negative; supported, unsupported by text

4. Group Interaction (Bales, 1950)
   a. Shows solidarity
   b. Shows tension release
   c. Shows agreement
   d. Gives suggestion
   e. Gives opinion
   g. Gives orientation, information
   h. Asks for orientation, information
   i. Asks for opinion
   j. Asks for suggestion
   k. Shows disagreement
   l. Shows tension
   m. Shows antagonism

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

1. Purpose for reading
2. Process of reading
3. Text content
4. Organization of text
5. Language/style of text
6. Purpose for discussion

TEXT-SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

1. Focus (See 1-5, General Expectations)
2. Specificity
3. Correctness
4. Certainty
5. Spontaneity

TABLE 1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

a response, such as text content or organization or reader personal associations. Quality of response further describes the nature of a response. For example, a comprehension response may reflect correct or erroneous comprehension, or neither, posing a question about what is meant. Or evaluative responses may be positive, neutral, or negative, and may or may not be supported by evidence from the text. Finally, it became obvious during my analysis that group responses needed special consideration beyond their style, focus, and quality, in order to avoid distortion due to the group interaction. Thus group responses were also classified according to the Bales Interaction Process Analysis Categories (1950).

General expectations. The categories for describing general expectations parallel many of the focus of response subcategories. Readers' general expectations concerned purpose for reading, process of reading, text content, text organization, or text language or style. Additionally, these readers expressed expectations for the purposes of discussion.

Text-specific expectations. The focus or topic of what a reader predicted for upcoming text again corresponds to many of the focus of response subcategories. The readers' articulated text-specific expectations also ranged from very specific to general, correct to incorrect, and certain to uncertain. Finally, some predictions were made spontaneously as part of responding, while others were obviously in answer to the prediction task.

Results of the Study

While extremely interesting, space limitations preclude highly detailed descriptions of the three girls' responses and expectations. Instead, I present below generalizations drawn from their responses and expectations, and provide numerous examples and quotations from the transcriptions.

Responses to Short Stories and Textbook Selections

Each of the three readers had a preferred pattern of response common to the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

short stories and textbook selections. While all were able to respond in a variety of ways and about a number of topics, each girl had an overall preferred pattern of response which included style, focus, and quality. For example, during her reading Kate analyzed--evaluated by interpreting and explaining aspects of a text or her responses--and following reading she analyzed further and made generalizations. The following post-reading response to "The Scarlet Ibis" is typical of Kate's generalizing:

> It is a nice connection [between the ibis and Doodle]. And I think maybe it's getting at the theme...that people only have a certain capacity, and they can't go beyond that.

Overall, Pat's responses during reading demonstrated her concern with literal and interpretive comprehension; following reading she analyzed. The following is one of Pat's ongoing responses to "The Scarlet Ibis:"

> Sounds like it [takes place in the South] with the swamps and magnolia. Magnolias only grow in the South. They call the South the Bible Belt, and here it says how he was born in a caul and she calls it Jesus's nightgown.

And Tess' overall style of response was involvement during and following reading; she also analyzed following reading. These responses, one to a short story and the other to a textbook selection, demonstrate the intensity of her involvement:

> This is sick. The older brother is a jerk! Oh, my God! To make him touch his coffin, the coffin they were going to use to bury him! That's ick! I don't like that. I do not like that at all... God! Honestly, I would have done the same thing as Doodle; I would have screamed!

> This is so obviously written by a man, it's pathetic...God, what a chauvenist statement, "the father usually works and spends less time at home than the mother." Oh, it makes me sick! That is really sickening.

The three girls also had preferred focuses in their responses which are integral to their patterns of response. So Kate's responses were often about theme, symbols, or purposes for reading. Pat made statements about the setting and the poetic language of the short stories and the written style of the text-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

book selections. An example is this ongoing response to "The Scarlet Ibis:"

> Doodle. [laughs] I love that name. Maybe he likes to sit around and doodle or something. Old Woman Swamp. [laughs] I like that name. I like the way this James Hurst writes. It kind of flows. It's easy to read. It reminds me a little bit of poetry, especially in the introduction.

All three girls commented on the short story characters and events and all related their own knowledge to the ideas presented in the textbook selections. But for each girl, a focus on story characters or on a personal association was associated with a different style of response. For example, Kate used her personal associations to assist her analyses, Pat's interpretive comprehension was enhanced by her knowledge, and Tess reacted emotionally because her knowledge and beliefs were in disagreement with text content.

Finally, for each of the girls there were parallels in the quality of responses to the short stories and textbook selections. For both types, Kate supported her generalizations and analyses with text evidence. The majority of her responses were insightful, although she sometimes provided a "moral of the story" which went beyond what could be supported by the text or provided a hypothetical scenario which was inappropriate. Pat often asked questions or wondered about her comprehension or inferences for both text types, and noted evidence for one understanding or another when it occurred in later text segments. For example, she noted in her ongoing responses to "The Scarlet Ibis:"

> I was right about its taking place awhile ago. It says about bombardment in World War I. Let's see [referring to a footnote]. 1918. And about the setting. We know they're down in the South because of the cotton.

Pat's analyses of the stories were occasionally overextended; similarly, her personal associations or statements of knowledge or beliefs were sometimes inappropriate since she applied her positive and upper-middle-class experiences to text about working-class families. And the personal involvement shown in Tess'

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

responses was equally strong for both types of text.

To summarize briefly, each of the three participants had an overall preferred pattern of response--which included ways of responding, topics of response, and quality of response--similar for the short stories and the textbook selections.

General Expectations for Fiction, Exposition, and Sharing Responses

Expectations concerning purposes for reading informed all other general expectations. While there were some general expectations commonly held by all three readers for fiction or exposition, the combinations of expectations and the strengths with which they were held were individual.

In explaining their purposes for reading fiction, all three girls distinguished between two types of stories, what they termed "good" stories and "light" or "trash" stories. All enjoyed "light" stories and stated that the purpose of such reading was enjoyment or escape. "Good" stories share with "light" stories the purpose of enjoyment, but in addition they convey a message about life as viewed by another person, the author. As Kate explained, "A story has to have a theme, a meaning, a reason why it was written. Otherwise it's just a jumple of words." Slatoff (1970) commented on the contradictory nature of these purposes: a response to a story which challenges preconceived values or current orderings of experiences may involve disruption and disorder, hardly an enjoyable experience. In fact, this disruption characterized Kate's reading of "Marigolds" and Tess' reading of "The Scarlet Ibis."

In contrast, exposition's purpose is to inform. Exposition was not categorized as "light" or "good" as fiction was, but as "interesting" or "dull." All three readers said they find their reading of exposition to be boring some of the time. Kate related this to the fact that expository reading is often assigned, Pat to exposition's frequent irrelevance to her concerns, and Tess to her preference for stories. All expect to enjoy and become involved in stories, assigned or not,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

because "stories are about people" and their conflicts, but they do not expect to enjoy or become involved with exposition.

Concerning the reading process, Pat explained that she read every word of a short story carefully, so she wouldn't miss anything. And all expressed abhorrence at "looking ahead" to see how a story would end. However, all three said they "skim" exposition, although exactly what they mean by this and when they use this process differ. Tess, for example, "skims" when she finds reading dull--by skipping paragraphs to see if the next parts are more interesting. Kate skims to see what an assignment is generally about, and if she decides she should note details, she will reread more carefully. And Pat skims only when her time is limited, preferring to read exposition as carefully as she reads fiction.

There were similarities and differences in the girls' general expectations for story content, organization, and style. All expressed a strong preference for realistic characters and plots, and defined "realistic" in terms of their own knowledge and experiences. (All noted their dislike of science fiction because it is "unbelievable.") For Tess, characters are most important, since they are the key to her involvement:

> I think with stories, they're told by a person, or about a person, so you tend to get into their way of thinking. And you tend to grow emotionally attached. So it's like happening to you or to a friend of yours. Subconsciously, I think about what would have happened to me.

For Kate, theme and symbols are central. Thus her prediction of what "The Scarlet Ibis" might be about, knowing only the title, was "Scarlet--bleeding, death, dying?" All three readers articulated expectations for narrative structure, including an introduction, episodes which fit together and build to a climax, and an ending. Tess' expectation for a fair ending was not permeable, or open to alternatives, and she rejected "The Scarlet Ibis" and accepted "Marigolds" according to her perception of the fairness of the ending. Kate emphasized that endings should follow from story events, an expectation reflected in this response:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"I think the fact that there was no surprise in Doodle's death is good; it makes it...more effective. The reader has been warned about it." Finally, only Pat expressed an appreciation of style or language as an important general expectation. Tess mentioned style, but for her this meant the author "gets on with it" so the story doesn't "drag."

The girls' general expectations for expository content and organization were more consistent than those for fiction. These readers' expectations for the content of exposition were based on exposition's informational purpose: the information should be truthful, recent, complete, and unbiased. According to Kate, the content of exposition is "facts" which describe a "single event;" that is, exposition is not generalizable in the way fiction is. Further, Kate stated that exposition should have "many details" and that these details should fulfill the reason the text is being read. In their responses to the textbook selections, the girls' general expectations for expository content are obvious, as they typically noted their agreement or disagreement with the "facts," stating "That's true" or "That's a fact" according to their knowledge and experiences. But in contrast to their general expectations for narrative structure, none of these readers articulated a general expectation for the structure of exposition. Nor was a sense of organization evident in their responses to the textbook selections. Thus text organization does not appear to be included in their general expectations for exposition. Finally, as was true for fiction, only Pat mentioned style as a general expectation for exposition. She said,

> Like I love Newsweek. It's my favorite magazine. I like the way they deliver the information; I pick up on the writer's style. It's got to catch your eye. It's got to be interesting. You want it to be--how do I want to say it--you want to turn the page. You want to continue reading...a writer can make it so that something that originally wouldn't catch my eye is interesting.

Pat also commented that exposition needs to be "clear." For her, written style is central to her general expectations for both fiction and exposition.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In addition to general expectations for fiction and exposition, Kate, Pat, and Tess held expectations for the sharing of their responses. In the individual sessions, all initially seemed to think of response as the answering of questions. They finished reading a segment and would wait expectantly for a question, even though they knew the task was to state their opinions, feelings, thoughts, and reactions, and even though they had practiced this task successfully at the initial session. It seems likely that this is a result of their classroom experiences, for as the study progressed their reticence to initiate their own responses gradually diminished, although it never completely disappeared.

In the group sessions however, all three were eager and willing to exchange ideas, and demonstrated cooperation in taking turns during these lively sessions. Pat assumed a teacher-like role, opening the discussions with a question and periodically asking a question which changed the topic of discussion. In small groups, all seemed to think of response as the sharing of ideas, opinions, questions, and personal associations and feelings. Disagreement was expected and desirable. These expectations for group discussions also appear to result from the girls' classroom experiences, since their teachers in the interdisciplinary classes regularly used small group discussions.

Text-Specific Expectations for Short Stories and Textbook Selections

Type of text had a marked influence on these readers' establishment of text-specific expectations during reading. Kate, Pat, and Tess all established text-specific expectations for the short stories, making spontaneous predictions and reading with a sense of what would happen next. But none of them read with a strong sense of the direction or organization of the textbook selections. At the same time, there were individual differences in the text-specific expectations for the short stories and in the predictions made for the textbook selections.

For the short stories, all three readers first established a global expectation

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

for what each story would be about near the beginning of their reading, and usually following the first segment. For example, Tess stated of "The Scarlet Ibis," "It's going to be about their [Doodle and the brother's] relationship, obviously, all the way through." The girls' global expectations for each story were generally correct and were used as a framework for establishing more specific expectations as reading progressed. These more specific expectations were influenced by the related factors of involvement with the characters, comprehension of text, general expectations for fiction, and individual experiences and knowledge in relation to the authors' experiences and knowledge as revealed in the stories. For example, Kate found it difficult to sympathize with Lizabeth in "Marigolds" since her upper-middle-class background was so distant from Lizabeth's Depression-time poverty. Perhaps an element of "happiness binding" (Squire, 1964) was also involved in Kate's spontaneous and incorrect predictions that Lizabeth would get to know and like Miss Lottie, that her father would get a job with Miss Lottie, and that Lizabeth would "fix" the flowers. On the other hand, Tess' intense sympathy with Doodle in "The Scarlet Ibis" and her general expectation that stories have fair outcomes, led her to incorrectly expect a "happy ending" where Doodle grew strong and succeeded in school. Pat's text-specific expectations differed from Kate's and Tess' in that she qualified her expectations or cast them as questions: "Maybe Doodle's starting to grow up or something?" or "Maybe she's going to wreck Miss Lottie's flowers. Then again, maybe she'll stop herself in time, who knows?" The text-specific expectations of these readers indicate their involvement in the stories, familiarity with the narrative pattern of development, or both.

In contrast, none of the three read with a strong sense of the direction or organization of the textbook selections; none of them made spontaneous predictions. The development of text-specific expectations was not an important part

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

of their reading and responding to the textbook selections, as it had been for the short stories. This suggests a possible lack of involvement in the texts or a not unexpected lack of knowledge about the content or organization of the texts.

At the same time, the readers' ability to make correct predictions as part of the prediction task of the study was influenced by the explicitness of cues or markers in the text. All were able to make correct predictions for the selection with headings and subheadings when reminded to do so. For the other text, the absence of direct cues led to incorrect or general predictions which were based on the readers' background knowledge. For example, Pat imposed a developmental organization on this text in her predictions, although this was not the authors' structure, and she used her organization to make inferences and to structure her retelling of what the text was about. There was also a difference in the attitude of the girls toward predicting for the two selections. For the marked text, this task made sense to them, because information about upcoming text was provided and they could look back to the text to find it. But for the text without headings or direct cues, Tess' reactions ranged from playfulness to annoyance, and Kate and Pat were uncooperative, generally ignoring their earlier predictions during their reading and responding.

The Impact of Group Responses

For only one of the girls did the group discussions result in a distinct change in later individual post-discussion responses. But group discussions were beneficial for all three girls since the discussions led them to extend the focus of their responses, and to clarify, reexamine, and verify their earlier individual responses to both the short stories and the textbook selections. Also, the exchange of ideas in a group of peers had positive affective outcomes.

Only for Pat was there a change in the style of response to the short stories which can be clearly attributed to the group discussions. Her understanding

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

of what happened in the short stories did not change, but her notion of what the stories were about expanded to include a statement of theme, so that she also made generalizations. Similarly, Pat had read the textbook selections less critically than Kate or Tess, and the discussions led her to extend the depth of her evaluation of the textbook selections. Kate's responses after the discussions did not change markedly from her earlier individual responses, although she had new insights during the group discussions which supported her opinions, and the focus of her group responses expanded to include written style. It remains unclear whether or not Kate's short story generalization responses would change were another discussant to articulate and support more appropriate statements of theme. Tess' post-discussion responses were also similar to her earlier individual responses, even though Kate and Pat argued persuasively for a different interpretation of "The Scarlet Ibis." Instead, Tess tenaciously defended her own inference in the group discussion, and stated she was unwilling to listen to their explanations. In similar situations where Tess is unable to assume the spectator stance--where she is intensely involved with a character--it is possible that she would be unable to benefit from group discussions.

At the same time, each participant made group responses which extended the focus of the others' group responses. For example, Tess' incorrect inference about the ending of "The Scarlet Ibis" led Kate and Pat to reexamine and defend their views, positive outcomes, although they eventually became exasperated at Tess' refusal to "listen to reason." Tess also turned the topic of discussion of the textbook selections to the stereotypical depiction of male and female roles, which led both Pat and Kate to reexamine their responses. Kate initiated discussion of general expectations for fiction and exposition and presented her opinions about the stories' themes, topics which would not have been addressed in the discussions except for her presence. Similarly, Pat initiated discussion

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

of the "poetic language" of the two stories and the written style of the textbook selections. Finally, in seeking confirmation of what they found to be interesting or questionable in the textbook selections, these readers led each of the others to reexamine and clarify earlier responses.

But these discussions had impact on the participants other than that of influencing their responses. All the participants indicated their enjoyment of the discussions. While they found discussions of both types of text to be beneficial, all three preferred the short story discussions. They attributed this preference to the fact that they liked the story texts better and to the relative lack of disagreement during the textbook selection discussions. The transcripts reveal numerous disagreements during the discussions of both text types, but for the textbook selections, the disagreements were not central to understanding the content, focusing instead on tangential issues. The lack of disagreement was explained by all three readers as due to exposition's not being open to interpretation in the way stories are. As Kate said, "You just have to kind of accept things as fact. Until you can prove them wrong with more facts, there's not much you can say about it."

The three participants in this study were all sensitive to the patterns of their peers' responses. They noted the strengths and weaknesses of the other girls' responses, and evaluated their own responses in light of those of their peers. For example, Kate expressed amazement at the way Pat could focus on and remember important details and sentences. Pat mentioned how Tess' emotional responses to the short stories blocked her openness to other interpretations. Pat also remarked on Tess' responses to the textbook selections:

> It ["Structure and Interaction in the American Family"] was really interesting. I didn't agree with parts, but Tess really shows herself to be a, you know, feminist. Obviously! I'm not.

And Tess commented when attempting to explain the discrepancy between her under-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

standing of "The Scarlet Ibis" and the other girls':

> I have one older sister, and Kate has all younger brothers and sisters. So that could be a perspective on it. Because Kate really felt sorry for the older kid and she is the older kid, and I felt really sorry for Doodle and I'm the youngest.

The opportunity to be involved in small group discussions with the same group members was new to the participants, and they enjoyed identifying and evaluating the others' typical responses.

Responses and Expectations Reconsidered: Evaluative Responses

For all the participants, evaluations of both the short stories and the textbook selections were based on whether or not the text matched or contradicted their general expectations, and whether or not text content matched or contradicted their experiences and knowledge. Evaluations of the short stories were also based on whether their text-specific expectations were met. Permeability of expectations and background knowledge was also related to evaluation. Kate, for example, did not reject "Marigolds" when her text-specific expectations were not met, but rather reexamined her expectations and comprehension, attempting to assimilate this author's understandings with her own. The disparity between Lizabeth's situation and her own family life led her to accept the story, but to disagree with its theme: "I wouldn't think that it's [the theme, that life is ugly and barren] necessarily true. I think it's a one-sided look at life." Kate preferred "The Scarlet Ibis," the story for which her text-specific expectations were met. Tess showed that she was less open to contradiction of her general and text-specific expectations. She rejected "The Scarlet Ibis" because of its "completely unsatisfactory" ending. In contrast, "Marigolds" did end as she expected, and did have a just ending, in her view, so she strongly preferred this story. Pat provided herself with alternative expectations during her reading, her text-specific expectations were not contradicted, her general expectation

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

for style was met, and she enjoyed and accepted both short stories.

As noted earlier, these readers evaluated the textbook selections according to their general expectation that the content is truthful, recent, and complete, since the purpose of exposition is to inform. An example is one of Kate's responses to "Agencies of Socialization: The Family:"

> Well, I think it's true about the mother and father. It's a fact. But it's stereotypes again. And I don't know how old this [the text] is anyhow [checks to see if there is a date on the front page]. These days lots of fathers are more involved in the care of the children.

Pat also evaluated the written style of the textbook selections, preferring one over the other since it was "pretty clear" and "smooth," while the other was "too choppy." Since the establishment of text-specific expectations was not an important aspect of the girls' reading and responding, whether or not they made correct predictions had little impact on their evaluations of the textbook selections.

A major difference in the girls' evaluations of short stories and textbook selections concerns their willingness to change the text. Except for Tess' desire to change the ending of "The Scarlet Ibis," the girls would not make changes in the short stories, even when they had criticisms of the characters or events, or their text-specific expectations were not met. Evidently, the general expectation concerning purpose for reading fiction overrides violation of text-specific expectations or background and expereinces. In other words, to change these stories would have violated the purpose for reading fiction, to "learn about life" from another person's perspective. In contrast, all three of the girls would make changes in the textbook selections. Changes included making the information more recent or complete or avoiding sterotypes. Pat would also change the style to make the texts easier to read. And Kate advised adding examples of "real people" to make the selections more interesting. In fact, all these readers said exposition was more interesting and readable when elements of narrative are

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

included. When missing, they added their own in the form of personal associations or hypothetical scenarios. These readers' willingness to change exposition, but not fiction, was based on their contrasting purposes for reading these two text types.

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study support a theory of reader response which includes critical and subjective responses to both literature and exposition, and which accounts for the roles of reader, text, and peers in response.

More specifically, the results of this study support the findings of Squire (1964), Galda (1980), and Mauro (1983) that readers have preferred responses to literature, and suggest that these preferences extend to exposition. If adolescents do have preferred patterns of responding common to both short stories and textbook selections, as did the participants of the present study, then teachers need to be aware of these preferences. In some instances an individual's preferred way, focus, or quality of response may not be the most appropriate or rewarding. Teachers need to encourage development of a wide variety of responses. When students have alternatives, they may respond more fully and flexibly, according to the purposes for reading and the demands of a particular text.

The results of this study also support the findings of Mauro (1983) and Cullinan, et al. (1983) that readers' expectations for fiction and their background knowledge or experiences influence their evaluation of literature. The findings of the present study suggest that exposition is evaluated similarly. An interesting and important question growing out of this study's findings about general expectations concerns how expectations for reading and responding are established. Applebee (1978) examined how the concept of story develops in children from ages 2-17, but to my knowledge there has been no examination of

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

how the "concept of exposition" is developed. Since children usually encounter stories before informational text, it is possible that at some point general expectations for exposition are developed by modifying story expectations. Further research might examine how general expectations for exposition develop.

Each participant in this study established general expectations which differed for fiction and exposition. And while there was notable agreement among these readers about the purposes for reading fiction and exposition, other expectations about content, organization, or style were individual. The strength with which these general expectations were held also varied. By providing students like Kate, Pat, and Tess with a wide variety of reading materials, teachers might encourage them to develop fuller and more flexible sets of general expectations, which in turn might enable them to respond appropriately to the fiction and exposition they encounter both in and out of the classroom.

The three adolescents of this study did not establish text-specific expectations for exposition, although they were able to predict what upcoming text would be about when explicit cues were supplied. This finding conflicts with studies investigating readers' use of macrostructure to organize recall of text information. Perhaps readers like Kate, Pat, and Tess need instruction and practice in developing text-specific expectations based on their general expectations and use of text structure. Further, if readers like Kate, Pat, and Tess are expected to predict what upcoming text will be about in order to aid their comprehension and recall of expository texts, then teachers and textbook publishers need to evaluate their textbooks for the presence of explicit text cues. Teachers might also explore text content with their students before reading and discuss the value of using background knowledge for predicting what future segments of text may be about when explicit text cues

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

are absent.

The findings of this study also support Wilson's (1966) and Beach's (1973) conclusions that students are able to go beyond their individual responses as a result of sharing responses in a group of peers. The present study extends these conclusions--to a lesser degree--to expository texts. Taken with Galda's (1980) findings that only one of three fifth-grade participants was able to learn from peer discussions, the results of this study suggest that there may be a developmental pattern for students' ability to extend their responses as a result of peer group discussions. Future research might explore how this ability develops, as well as how group make-up influences students' ability to learn from discussions.

By encouraging the sharing of responses in a variety of settings (such as peer pairs, small groups, and whole class) teachers might extend the response capacities of students like Kate, Pat, and Tess. These readers' awareness of the other group members' responses, and the purposes for discussion, and their ability to compare their own responses with those of their peers suggest that it may indeed be possible to expand the repertoire of an individual's responses and reduce inappropriate responses to both fiction and exposition through group discussions.

If our goal as educators is to develop readers capable of appropriate responses to a variety of texts, then we must first understand how students do read and respond to texts. This study compared the oral responses of three adolescents to short stories and textbook selections, identified their general expectations for fiction and exposition, examined and compared their text-specific expectations for two short stories and two textbook selections, and compared their individual and group responses. Thus this study has added to our

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

understanding of adolescents' responses. With a more complete understanding of how students do read and respond to a variety of texts, teachers may be better able to guide their students beyond literal comprehension to critical, full, and flexible responses to a variety of text types. And when students are capable of a range of responses, they will be more likely to find rewards in their reading, and so choose to become lifetime readers.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

References

Anderson, R.C., Reynolds, R.E., Schallert, D.L., & Goetz, E.Z. (1977). Frameworks for comprehending discourse. American Educational Research Journal, 14, 367-381.

Applebee, A.N. (1978). The Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bales, R.F. (1950). Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley Press

Beach, R. (1973). The literary response process of college students. The English Record, 23(4), 98-114.

Berger, A.C. & Robinson, H.A. (Eds.). (1982). Secondary School Reading: What Research Reveals for Classroom Practice. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.

Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (1982). Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Britton, J. (1982). Prospect and Retrospect: Selected Essays of James Britton. G.M. Pradl (Ed.). Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Collier, Eugenia. (1981). Marigolds. In P. McFarland, F. Feagin, & S. Hay (Eds.), Focus on Literature: Forms (pp. 307-317). Boston: Houghton Mifflen. (Original work published 1969)

Cullinan, B.E., Harwood, K.T., & Galda, L. (1983). The reader and the story: Comprehension and response. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 16, 29-38.

Elkin, F. & Handel, G. (1972). Agencies of socialization: The family. The Child and Society: The Process of Socialization (2nd ed., pp. 100-110). New York: Random House.

Galda, S.L. (1980). Three children reading stories: A developmental approach to response to literature in preadolescents. (Doctoral dissertation, New York University.) Dissertation Abstracts International, 41, 2438A.

Galda, L. (1983). Research in response to literature. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 16, 1-7.

Hare, V.C. & Pulliam, C.A. (1980). College students' metacognitive awareness of reading behaviors. In M.L. Kamil & A.J. Moe (Eds.), Perspectives on Reading Research and Instruction: 29th Yearbook of the Nat[illegible] Reading Conference (pp. 226-231). Washington, DC: National Reading Conference.

Holland, N.H. (1975). Five Readers Reading. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Hurst, J. (1981). The scarlet ibis. In P. McFarland, F. Feagin, & S. Hay (Eds.), Focus on Literature: Forms (pp. 321-331). Boston: Houghton Mifflen. (Original work published 1974).

Iser, W. (1978). The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Light, D. Jr. & Keller, S. (1982). Structure and interaction in the American family. Sociology (3rd ed., pp. 388-399). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Mauro, L.H. (1983). Personal constructs and response to literature: Case studies of adolescent readers. (Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University.) Dissertation Abstracts International, 83, 2589A.

Mize, J.M. (1980). The relationship between reading performance and awareness of comprehension of textbook passages. In M.L. Kamil & A.J. Moe (Eds.), Perspectives on Reading Research and Instruction: 29th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference (pp. 34-37). Washington, DC: National Reading Conference.

Odell, L. & Cooper, C.R. (1976). Describing responses to works of fiction. Research in the Teaching of English, 10, 203-225.

Olson, D.R. (1977). From utterance to text: The bias of language in speech and writing. Harvard Educational Review, 47, 257-281.

Patching, W., Kameenui, E., Carnin, D., Gerste, R., & Colvin, G. (1983). Direct instruction in critical reading skills. Reading Research Quarterly, 18(4), 406-418.

Purves, A.C. (1973). Literature Education in Ten Countries. New York: John Wiley.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1976). Literature as Exploration (3rd. ed.). New York: Noble and Noble. (Original work published 1938)

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1978). The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rumelhard, D.E. (1980). Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In R.J. Spiro, B.C. Bruce, & W.F. Brewer (Eds.), Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension: Perspectives from Cognitive Psychology, Linguistics, Artificial Intelligence, and Education (pp. 33-58). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Slatoff, W. (1970). With Respect to Readers: Dimensions of Literary Response. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Squire, J.R. (1964). The Responses of Adolescents While Reading Four Short Stories. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Wilson, J.R. (1966). Responses of College Freshmen to Three Novels. NCTE Research Report No. 7. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE